The Arrest and Trial of Jesus Christ
(Article)

Introduction:

As part of His last journey to Jerusalem, following His triumphant entry into the city, Jesus faces opposition by priests, Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, leading to His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and facing several trials initiated by the Jewish leaders, then standing trial before the Roman governor, Pilate, culminating in His crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem. (1)

While all four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) record several events of Jesus' arrest and trial, with different and also unique details, the Gospel of John is under scrutiny here, since it is here that we can see the sovereignty of God well-expressed, i.e. better understand that these events are not things that just happened to Jesus, but that Jesus *allowed* them to happen as part of God's foreordained plan to suffer and die for the sins of all believers, only to rise again as victor over death. (2)

The following is an exploration of the events preceding Christ's crucifixion, and are separated into five parts: First, the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, second, the hearing before Annas (ex-high priest), third, the hearing before Caiaphas (son-in-law of Annas, and active high priest at the time), fourth, Christ's first appearance before Pontius Pilate (Roman governor at the time) (3) and, fifth, the second and last appearance before Pilate. (4)

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

After Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples across the Kidron Valley, where they entered a garden. Now Judas His betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. So Judas brought a band of soldiers and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees. They arrived at the garden carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was coming upon Him, stepped forward and asked them, ***"Whom are you seeking?"*** "Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. Jesus said, ***"I am He."*** And Judas His betrayer was standing there with them. When Jesus said, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. So He asked them again, ***"Whom are you seeking?"*** "Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. ***"I told you that I am He,"*** Jesus replied. ***"So if you are looking for Me, let these men go."*** This was to fulfill the word He had spoken: *"I have not lost one of those You have given Me."* Then Simon Peter drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. ***"Put your sword back in its sheath!"*** Jesus said to Peter. ***"Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?"*** Then the band of soldiers, with its commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him. They brought Him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be better if one man died for the people.

John 18:1–14 (BSB)

Commentary:

Following His triumphant entry, the Last Supper and His struggle in the garden of Gethsemane, we see here the coming to pass of the predictions Jesus makes about His 'passion' (His suffering and death) and about His resurrection - notably, the Sanhedrin had already plotted to set out to kill Jesus (secretly) on their own initiative (Mark 14:1-2; Matthew 26:1-5; Luke 22:1-2; John 11:45-57) and Judas Iscariot had already agreed to betray Jesus outside of the religious festivities at the time (Mark 14:10-11; Matthew 26: 14-16; Luke 22:3-6). (5)

In this passage, we encounter Jesus as He faces His betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane (v.1-2). Gethsemane is derived from the Hebrew meaning 'oil press,' located on the western parts of Olivet, providing a view of the Kidron ravine and the Jerusalem temple. (6) The arrival of Judas (one of Jesus' twelve disciples) with Jewish and possibly Roman authorities

with weapons indicates their fear of resistance by our Lord's disciples (v.3). (7)

In v.4 we learn that Jesus already knows what is about to happen, and in v.5-6 we see Jesus taking the initiative, as well as revealing His divinity in His response "I am He" (egō eimi) recalling God's divine name (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58) - hereby, initiating a theophany (God's appearance producing fear and awe in human beings) - causing His assailants to fall back to the ground. (8)

In v.7-9 we see here that Jesus is in control and insists that His men be let go, thereby fulfilling prophecy along the way (v.9). Peter, trying to defend Jesus on his own accord, cuts off a high priestly servant's ear (v.10) - whom Jesus heals (a detail recorded only in Luke 22:51) - rebuking Peter for his action, and thereby demonstrating His sovereign authority, along with Christ's own immediate purpose coming to fruition. (9) Jesus then lets Himself be arrested, taken away to the high priest Annas, while His disciples flee (Mark 14:50-51; Matthew 26:56), but Peter - along with an unnamed disciple - follows Jesus (John 18:15).

Examination By High Priest (Annas)

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. ***"I have spoken openly to the world,"*** Jesus answered. ***"I always taught in the synagogues and at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why are you asking Me? Ask those who heard My message. Surely they know what I said."*** When Jesus had said this, one of the officers standing nearby slapped Him in the face and said, "Is this how You answer the high priest?" Jesus replied, ***"If I said something wrong, testify as to what was wrong. But if I spoke correctly, why did you strike Me?"***
John 18:19–23 (BSB)

Commentary:

In this passage (recorded only in John's Gospel) we see that even though Jesus is truthfully responding to their questions (v.19-21) He is unjustly attacked physically (v.22) which sets up the remainder of His time on earth as part of His passion. The preliminary hearing here is significant in

that even though Annas had been deposed by the Romans, he was still viewed by the Jewish leaders as high priest (an office held for life) - and it can be inferred that Jesus is requesting a legal hearing with the active high priest. (10)

Hearing Before Caiaphas (Active High Priest) And The Sanhedrin

Then Annas sent Him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.
John 18:24 (BSB)

They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders, and scribes assembled. Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the officers and warmed himself by the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were seeking testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but they did not find any. For many bore false witness against Jesus, but their testimony was inconsistent. Then some men stood up and testified falsely against Him: “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple, and in three days I will build another that is made without hands.’ ” But even their testimony was inconsistent. So the high priest stood up before them and questioned Jesus, “Have You no answer? What are these men testifying against You?” But Jesus remained silent and made no reply. Again the high priest questioned Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” ***“I am,”*** said Jesus, ***“and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”*** At this, the high priest tore his clothes and declared, “Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. What is your verdict?” And they all condemned Him as deserving of death. Then some of them began to spit on Him. They blindfolded Him, struck Him with their fists, and said to Him, “Prophesy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in His face.
Mark 14:53–65 (BSB)

Commentary:

While John does not record the details of Jesus' being before the Sanhedrin led by Caiaphas the active high priest, we have several records in Mark 14:53-65 (see Bible passage above), in Matthew 26:57-68 and in Luke 22:66-71). Taken together we find unique details about this event, which are not contradictory, but rather complementary. As we also see here in v.2, Peter had followed Jesus into the high priestly courtyard, pre-empting his threefold denial of Jesus.

It becomes clear here, that as Jesus is standing before His accusers, there is no legal basis to charge Jesus with the death penalty, despite false witnesses and false accusations (v.55-60). Even though Jesus remains silent before these charges, He does answer truthfully to the high priest's question "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" (v.61), prompting Him to reply "I am" and alluding to the Old Testament (Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1):

> ***"I am,"*** said Jesus, ***"and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."***
>
> Mark 14:62 (BSB)

This leads the religious leaders to condemn Jesus for apparent blasphemy (v.65-64) as well as further physical assault (v.65). Notably, recorded only in Matthew (Matthew 27:1-10) we learn about Judas remorse and suicide, yet instead of turning back to Jesus, Judas turns to Christ's enemies, in effect, a refusal to surrender to Christ. (12) Significantly, these actions by Judas and the religious leaders fulfill additional prophecies from the Old Testament (Jeremiah 19:1-13; Zechariah 11:11-13).

Jesus' Two Appearances Before Pilate - The First Appearance

Then they led Jesus away from Caiaphas into the Praetorium. By now it was early morning, and the Jews did not enter the Praetorium, to avoid being defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and asked, "What accusation are you bringing against this man?" "If He were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed Him over to you." "You take Him and judge Him by your own law," Pilate told them. "We are not permitted to execute anyone," the Jews replied. This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to indicate the kind of death He was going to die.

Pilate went back into the Praetorium, summoned Jesus, and asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” ***“Are you saying this on your own,”*** Jesus asked, ***“or did others tell you about Me?”*** “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed You over to me. What have You done?” Jesus answered, ***“My kingdom is not of this world; if it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is not of this realm.”*** “Then You are a king!” Pilate said. ***“You say that I am a king,”*** Jesus answered. ***“For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.”*** “What is truth?” Pilate asked. And having said this, he went out again to the Jews and told them, “I find no basis for a charge against Him.”
John 18:28–38 (BSB)

Commentary:

In His first appearance before Pilate at the Roman governor’s palace (‘Praetorium’) the Jewish religious leaders - since they do not have authority over the death penalty (only the Romans held this authority at the time) - accuse Jesus of treason, and even though Pilate sees Jesus’ innocence and sees through the envious motives of His accusers (Mark 15:10) he does not set Jesus free. (13) What matters most here is that we see how Jesus is in control, since He interrogates Pilate (v.34), testifies to God’s divine Kingdom (v.36) and to truth itself: “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice,” (v.37) to which Pilate responds “what is truth?” (v.38) not knowing that the Messiah is standing right in front of him. (14) Pilate then announces that he finds no basis for a charge against Jesus (v.38). As we learn in Luke (Luke 23:6-12) Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, since Jesus is from Galilee, a region under Herod’s jurisdiction, yet Jesus stays silent before Herod, who sends Jesus back to Pilate. (15)

Jesus’ Two Appearances Before Pilate - The Second Appearance

But it is your custom that I release to you one prisoner at the Passover. So then, do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” “Not this man,” they shouted, “but Barabbas!” (Now Barabbas was an insurrectionist.) Then Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns, set it on His head, and dressed Him in a purple robe. And they went up to Him again and again, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and slapping Him in the face. Once again Pilate came out and said to the Jews,

“Look, I am bringing Him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him.” When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!” As soon as the chief priests and officers saw Him, they shouted, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” “You take Him and crucify Him,” Pilate replied, “for I find no basis for a charge against Him.” “We have a law,” answered the Jews, “and according to that law He must die, because He declared Himself to be the Son of God.” When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid, and he went back into the Praetorium. “Where are You from?” he asked. But Jesus gave no answer. So Pilate said to Him, “Do You refuse to speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You and authority to crucify You?” Jesus answered, ***“You would have no authority over Me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed Me over to you is guilty of greater sin.”*** From then on, Pilate tried to release Him, but the Jews kept shouting, “If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who declares himself a king is defying Caesar.” When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat on the judgment seat at a place called the Stone Pavement, which in Hebrew is Gabbatha. It was the day of Preparation for the Passover, about the sixth hour. And Pilate said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” At this, they shouted, “Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!” “Shall I crucify your King?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Caesar,” replied the chief priests. Then Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, and the soldiers took Him away.

John 18:39–19:16 (BSB)

Commentary:

In this segment we learn that Pilate is initially unwilling to condemn Jesus, since he recognizes Jesus as being innocent, but does not want to deal with a Jewish uprising, finally giving in to the crowd that is shouting “Crucify him!” (16) The mentioning of Barabbas, an insurrectionist and murderer (John 18:40 and Mark 15:7) and Pilate releasing him, instead of Jesus is a manifestation of great injustice - Pilate then has Jesus flogged in a attempt of trying to release Him (v.19:1-6) which also fails. (17)

Having also been warned by his wife about Jesus being innocent (Matthew 27:19) Pilate is fearful (John 19:8) of his own authority being compromised, and yet, even after Jesus declares:

> Jesus answered, ***“You would have no authority over Me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed Me over to you is guilty of greater sin.”***
>
> John 19:11 (BSB)

At this point, he desperately tries to release Jesus (v.12). Nevertheless, Pilate's fear of failure before Caesar (the Roman emperor) as a result of a riot, leads him to give in to the shouting mob and decides to have Jesus crucified (v.16). (18)

Conclusion:

To sum up, as we have seen, from a solely human perspective, the arrest and trial appear to be arbitrary. In fact, the Jewish religious leaders had already decided to plot against Jesus even before His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. However, as we see in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus lets Himself be arrested, in order to fulfill God's divine plan of salvation for all believers. (19)

At His first examination before Annas the high priest, Jesus essentially rebukes him for the secrecy of the trial (John 18:20-21) - Jesus remains bold and steadfast speaking the truth, even in the face of evil. (20) Then at the hearing before Caiaphas and the trial before the Sanhedrin, despite false witnesses testifying against Jesus, Jesus Himself truthfully affirms that He is the Messiah, leading the Jewish religious leaders to falsely accuse Jesus of blasphemy. (21) Nevertheless, as they miss the "Son of Man" having been prophesied about in Daniel 7:13-14, Jesus does not miss out on witnessing to them about Himself, as He is closer to God the Father than anyone else, announcing His Second Coming. (22)

Having been declared 'guilty of a crime deserving the death penalty,' the two appearances before Pilate, are a continuation of the hypocrisy exhibited by the Jewish leaders, to the extent that they exalt the pagan Roman Emperor (Caesar) above God's own Messiah, Jesus. Despite recognizing Jesus not being guilty, Pilate decides to crucify an innocent man, giving in to the demands and shouts of the Sanhedrin and allows the crucifixion of Christ.

What remains is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesies, Jesus' own prophesies about Himself (being raised from the dead), and prophesies fulfilled unrelated to any activity on Jesus' part (such as Judas' suicide and the Sanhedrin's reaction). The authority of Jesus and His eternal kingdom stands firm (25) and we see God's sovereign will is done (26).

Appendix A

(The Arrest and Trial of Jesus Christ - Suggested Sequence of Events)

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus is betrayed and arrested, the disciples flee.	26:47-56	14:43-52	22:47-53	18:2-12

Jesus is examined by Annas.	***	***	***	18:13-14; 19-23
Jesus is tried by Caiaphas and Sanhedrin.	26:57, 59-68	14:53, 55-65	22:54, 63-65	18:24
Peter denies Jesus three times.	26:58, 69-75	14:54, 66-72	22:54-62	18:15-18, 25-27
Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin.	27:1	15:1	22:66-71	***
Judas commits suicide.	27:3-10	***	***	***
Jesus appears before Pilate for first time.	27:2, 11-14	15:1-5	23:1-6	18:28-38
Jesus appears before Herod	***	***	23:7-12	***
Jesus appears before Pilate for the second time and is condemned (even though Pilate declares Him not guilty)!	27:15-26	15:6-15	23:13-25	18:39-19:16

Notes

(1) *Nelson's Complete Book Of Bible Maps And Charts*, 3rd ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010., p.311-313.
(2) *Nelson's Complete Book Of Bible Maps And Charts*, 3rd ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010., p.311.
(3) Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012., p.318.
(4) See Appendix A for a suggested sequence of events, adapted from Carson, D. A. ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015., 1949, 2021., p.2205-2206.
(5) Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012., p.176.
(6) Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009., p.393.
(7) Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009., p.394.
(8) Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, 2nd Edition: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020., p.388.
(9) Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, 2nd Edition: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020., p.388.
(10) Carson, D. A. ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015., 1949, 2021., p.2055.
(11) Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009., p.396-397.
(12) Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009., p.398.
(13) Carson, D. A. ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015., 1949, 2021., p.2055.
(14) Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, 2nd Edition: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020., p.389.
(15) Carson, D. A. ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015., 1949, 2021., p.2055.
(16) Carson, D. A. ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015., 1949, 2021., p.2055.
(17) Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012., p.278.
(18) Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009., p.401.
(19) Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012., p.318.
(20) Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, 2nd Edition: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020., p.389.
(21) Carson, D. A. ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015., 1949, 2021., p.2055.
(22) Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009., p.397.

(23) Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, 2nd Edition: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020., p.389.
(24) Gundry, Robert H. *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012., p.278.
(25) Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John. Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991., p.587.
(26) Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. The New American Commentary: Volume 24. Nashville, TN: B&H, 1992., p.563.

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Pastor John

Amen.